Nationalism, Globalization and Chavismo

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The Venezuelan political regime that collapsed with the election of cashiered Lieutenant Colonel Hguo Chávez Frías, was built upon the 1958 pact of Punto Fijo and Constitution of 1961. It rested upon a material basis: the distribution of oil rents via clientelism. The political scientist Juan Carlos Rey (1972) captured this idea famously in his phrase, "populist system of reconciliation." After the devaluation of the *bolívar* in 1983 it became apparent that oil rents would no longer suffice to meet the demands of rising consumption and population growth and urban values, and also to service the international debt. From that moment, a process of class polarization began to overtake the clientelist processes of integration that underlay *puntofijismo*.

The Punto Fijo era (1958-1998) leadership had long championed electoral democracy as the key to creating a sustainable non-oil economy and assertion of sovereign control over the subsoil. The oil boom of 1973-1983 and nationalization of the foreign oil companies in 1976 were the culmination of this project associating democracy, oil nationalism, and development. The devaluation, on a day known as "Black Tuesday" in Venezuela, signaled the beginning of not only a material but an ideological crisis, a crisis of legitimation. The explosive "*caracazo*" of February 1989, which engulfed every significant city in the country, not just Caracas, punctuated the collapse of the populist system of reconciliation. Less clear was what would take its place, and that question was still relevant two years after the December 1998 electoral victory of former Chávez, who had nearly toppled *puntofijismo* via military coup in 1992.

Shortly after he took office, a Datanalisis poll showed Chávez enjoying an astounding approval rating of 90.3 percent (*El Universal*, March 20, 1999). The opposition confidently predicted the president's support would evaporate once his supporters realized social conditions were not going to immediately improve. Thirty months after Chávez took office class polarization remained acute, levels of poverty marginally alleviated (at best) and associated social pathologies, such as crime, unabated. However, much to the consternation of his detractors, and against the predictions that the political appeal of the president would disappear without rapid improvements in social and economic conditions, the popularity of Chávez persisted into early 2001. For two years his popularity consistently registered above fifty percent in opinion polls. In February 2001, a Datanalisis poll showed that confidence in the ability of the president to deal with the country's problems had fallen from 66 percent, when he took office, to 42 percent in early 2001, but the president's overall approval ratings remained high (*El Universal*, January 27, 2001). In August 2001 a Mercoanalisis poll indicated that his approval ratings had dropped to 34 percent, but a Datanalisis survey found that 56 percent of the population still favorably evaluated the "president's work on behalf of the country."

What sustained the president's overall popularity ratings for so long, given relatively little improvement in the standard of living and overall economy? Do falling

approval ratings mean Chávez is a demagogue whose time has run out? I argue that Chávez's based of support is more deeply rooted in Venezuelan political culture than the attitudes tapped in the polls. His popularity depends not only on the ability to deliver immediate material improvements (though this too matters) to the impoverished majority that most resolutely supports him, but also on his ability to retain their confidence as their best and only voice of protest against global economic and political forces that offer little hope for a better future. The are not insignificant; they register the difficulty he faces in attempting to balance his role as a point of compromise between the "included" (incorporated) and "excluded" (marginalized). The opposition, however, is too visibly aligned with globalization to tap into popular frustration with the pace of improvements in social conditions.

Oil Nationalism, Development and *Puntofijismo*

Between 1945 and 1948, the *Acción Democrática* (AD) political party, led by Rómul Betancourt, attempted to implement a program of rapid modernization of Venezuela. Certain political fault lines in contemporary Venezuelan politics have their origins in the civilian-military coup that inaugurated this three-year period, the "*trienio"*. Although the *trienio* government was legitimated by landslide victories in three elections, Chávez, who is himself often criticized for having attempted to overthrow the elected government of Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992, frequently alludes to fact that AD initially came to power as the result of a military coup against the liberal, nationalist (but not directly elected) regime of General Isaías Medina Angarita. Medina at the time enjoyed the support of the Communist Party, with whom AD was locked in bitter rivalry, especially for the support of labor unions. Betancourt's influential writings defended this coup as necessary to pave the way for democracy. He portrayed Medina's oil reform of 1943 as a sell-out of national interests, and he depicted his own policies of "no more concessions" and "fifty/fifty" (equal shares of oil profits between the state and the companies) as the beginnings of oil nationalism (Betancourt 1978: 61-106).

Different interpretations and passions about Medina and the *trienio* remained the subjects of a deep undercurrent of resentment that ran just below the surface of Venezuelan politics during the Punto Fijo era but have become visible again today. Luis Miquilena, right hand advisor to Chávez and Secretary General of the *Movimiento Quinta República* (MVR, substituting the Roman numeral "V" for "*quinta*"), began his political life in the Communist Party (which he left sometime in the 1950s) as a prominent union leader. Another supporter of Medina was Salvador de la Plaza, whose defense of the 1943 oil reform and critique of Betancourt's *trienio* oil policies was almost forgotten in the euforia surrounding the oil boom and nationalization of 1976, but whose perspective inspired Alí Rodríguez Araque, Chávez's first Minister for Energy and Mines and Energy. Rodríguez designed the policies that revitalized the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The pact of Punto Fijo of 1958 was an attempt by elites to prevent a repetition of the coup of 1948, which ended the *trienio* and paved the way for the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez (Stamboui, 1980: 113-132). The pact was not only

inclusionary but also *exclusionary*. Specifically, it excluded the Communist Party, then a considerable force in Venezuelan politics, from power sharing agreements. The pact and the resulting political system survived military coups against the Betancourt presidency (1958-1953) and a decade long *fidelista* insurgency. Both left and right ideologies were assimilated into a centrist party system, all the more so as COPEI, founded by Rafael Caldera in 1946 as a vehicle for promoting Christian social doctrines in opposition to secular doctrines of AD, shed its character as a confessional party. After 1974, former guerrillas began to appear as members of Congress or even cabinet ministers. Regardless of party allegiance, Venezuelans could say, ruefully or not, "We're all *adecos* now."

The 1973 elections occurred just as the OPEC oil bonanza was getting underway. The success of OPEC hardly seemed capable of doing anything but reinforcing the stability of the regime. President Carlos Andrés Pérez and his planners imagined the immanent transformation of Venezuela into a great industrial power (Coronil, 1997; Karl 1997: 71-188). Within two years Venezuelan oil industry had been nationalized. However, the parties were now in uncharted seas, sailing international currents that carried them beyond the vision of progress of Betancourt and his contemporaries, who never envisioned a Venezuela without foreign capital. The path to nationalization was cleared because OPEC had already wrested control over levels of production from the companies and made them subject to the reference price system (Mommer 1988: 157-198). The political elite failed to develop a regulatory framework for this new situation, with disastrous consequences. Rents during the oil bonanza far exceeded the ability of the country to absorb capital. Ostentatious consumption increased in this period, leading some to conclude that the crisis stemmed mainly from a moral degeneration of the body politic. The institutions of democracy, especially the judiciary, seemed incapable of coping with the competition for new competition for rents. After the devaluation of the bolívar on February 28, 1983, a day known as "Black Tuesday," the distributive capability of the system waned. So did confidence that *this* democracy would spur development and opportunities.

Several scholars (Coppedge 1994; Crisp 2000) have demonstrated how the political parties lost much of their ideological coherence and became vehicles for contesting control over patronage during this time. There were often significant ideological and group interests at play (Ellner 1996), but personal factionalism seemed paramount in inner party struggles. The parties became the antithesis of Gramsci's notion of organizations in which individual and corporate interests are put aside in favor of a broader political perspective. By the 1980, in contrast, Venezuela workers joined a party to secure a job or get a raise, tradesman and shopkeepers to affect prices or obtain subsidies, professionals to advance their careers (Hellinger 1984). As oil rents contracted, what would hold the parties together? What future could they hold out to voters?

On February 16, 1989, outgoing President Jaime Lusinchi handed the presidential sash to his fellow *adeco*, Pérez, who began his second term with a lavish inauguration lending credence to the popular notion that the flamboyant "CAP" would restore the good times of a bi-gone, populist era. Only after the ceremonies were complete did Pérez announce that he had already negotiated a structural adjustment agreement, the "*paquete*"

(package), with the International Monetary Fund. On February 27, came the *caracazo*, a popular uprising set off by anger at *por puesto* (jitney) drivers, who, facing a 30 percent fuel-hike, attempted illegally to double fares and to refuse student discounts. Police, who had gone unpaid for some weeks, joined in the rioting, which spread to 19 other cities and lasted until March 5. The army was called to quell the revolt; when it was over medical personnel estimated 1,000 to 1,500 deaths, well above the official count of 287.

For decades, at least since 1943, the presence of the foreign oil companies had provided a safety valve in both a material sense, as governments increased the share of profits to meet new demands, and ideologically, as *imperialismo petrolero.* The mass opposition against dictatorship in 1958 had united people across class lines. In contrast, the *caracazo* of 1989 was the first mass action since 1935, when the death of Gómez sparked rural and urban unrest with strong class overtones.

On February 4, 1992 a second blow to *puntofijismo* was delivered by the coup attempt of Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez. Defeat was turned into political victory as a result of the electrifying moments in which Chávez appealed on national television for the revolting troops to surrender. He accepted sole responsibility for the defeat, something that impressed Venezuelans accustomed to politicians dodging responsibility. His statement that the objectives had not been met "for now" stirred popular hope that the struggle had only begun. On the streets, civilian supporters, especially younger parts of the population, began appearing in red berets similar to those worn by the paratroop commander and his troops.

López Maya (1999) has shown that the ensuing period was marked by a variety of protests demonstrating that "the political parties and unions had been losing their dynamism and capacity for popular representation and mediation, exhausted by the way they exercised power in the context of abundant money and resources of the Petro-State of the 1970s" (1999: 212). Having been told for fifty years that the country was rich, and now fully sovereign over oil, how could Venezuelans not conclude that their impoverishment was the fault of the politicians and elite linked closely to them? During the stormy congressional session following the February 4 military uprising, former President and Senator for Life Caldera dared to call the emperor naked. In the wake of speeches unanimously condemning the coup as an attack on democracy, he pointed out that the people had not poured into the streets in defense a democracy, a notable contrast to recent events in Eastern Europe, the Southern Cone of South America, the Philippines, and Tiananamen Square. (See his speech reproduced in *El Universal*, February 4, 2001). Congress finally removed Pérez from office, but the relatively inconsequential charges of malfeasance thinly disguised the action as a desperate attempt to remove the highly unpopular president from office before *puntofijismo* collapsed altogether.

The party system rapidly collapsed. Caldera won the 1993 presidential election after splitting from COPEI to run as the candidate of leftist *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) and a coalition of 16 other small parties, nicknamed "*chiriperi*," after small insects that together make noisy racket when they chirp together. He assumed office with a mandate from only 28 percent of the voters. Furthermore, integrity of the electoral

process itself was now in dispute among political elites. Official returns showed that Andrés Velásquez, candidate of a rising leftist party, fishing fourth, eight percentage points behind the winner, but *Causa R* maintained that its candidate had actually won the election. Bitter, sometimes violent, conflict surrounded charges of fraud in several state elections. What was new was the visible conflict, not fraud itself. AD and COPEI had been undermining the capacity of the Supreme Electoral Council for some time. The phrase, *"Acta mata voto,"* had become a cliché, meaning that the two large parties had long be known to steal votes by altering counts (the *acta*) reported at the local polling places. (Buxton 2001: 81). Entire *actas* were nullified due to "irregularities" in areas of *Causa R* strength. Ballot boxes containing results favorable to *Causa R* wre found in garbage dumps. Julia Buxton, who studied the election closely, concluded, "This disenfranchisement is not due to any failings on the part of the electorate, it is due to the politicization of table members which prevents the basic task of counting votes from being carried out in a fair and neutral manner" (2001: 89).

Caldera used his stature, political sagacity, and the political capital obtained from his 1992 speech to reduce political tensions somewhat. He replaced the restive high command of the military with loyalists, freed Chávez and his co-conspirators, and declared amnesty for exiled officers involved in a November 1992 coup attempt. However, the patriarch had no answer to the long-term economic decline that fed popular discontent. A major banking crisis in his first months of office exhausted what little room he had for economic maneuver and placed him at the mercy of international financial forces. After two years of improvisation, Caldera announced a program of structural adjustment, "Agenda Venezuela," little different from the hated *paquete* of CAP. Various subsidies and wage increases to the public sector were intended to lessen the blow to the public, but they failed to halt the further deterioration in the quality of life. Caldera discarded his reputation as a nationalist on oil and fully embraced the state oil company's "opening" (*apertura*) to foreign capital, designed to increase productive capacity, even though Venezuela was already regarded as a serious cheater in the OPEC export quota system.

Caldera had postponed the day of reckoning, but the proportion of Venezuelans seeking "radical changes" as opposed to "partial reforms" in the system continued to increase between 1995 and 1998. (See Table 1) As the 1998 election approached, it became clear that the major parties were in difficult straits. What might replace them was less clear.

Table 1: Percentage of the population expressing support for "radical change," "partial reform", or "no more changes" by quarter and year, 1995-98

	III-95	I-96	II-97	I-98	III-98
Cambios radicales	51%	55%	59%	60%	63%
Reformas parciales	26%	27%	25%	20%	27%
No más cambios	17%	13%	13%	13%	7%

Source: Consultores 21

Three Subversive Challenges to Puntofijismo

The 1993 election also revealed the emergence of insurgent political forces, due in part to opportunities created by limited political reforms. During the Lusinchi administration, a Presidential Commission on Reform of the State (COPRE) had made various proposals to decentralize state administration and democratize the internal workings of the parties. President Pérez accelerated some of these reforms, implementing in 1989 the first direct elections of governors and other state and municipal authorities. As Moisés Naím (2001) points out, the resulting decentralization of political and administrative power opened the way for new actors to emerge. "The proliferation of new centers of power, especially local, the increased influence of civic organizations and neighborhood associations, the disappearance of party discipline, the weakening -- and even disappearance of – entrepreneurial groups and of organized unionism, and the balkanization of politics, were characteristic of the last decade." These tendencies, he suggests, "permitted that the personal charisma of candidates for local and state government carry more weight than the parties" (Naím 2001).

In retrospect, one can see that these insurgent candidacies can be found in three sectors that sought to step into the vacuum: organized labor, professional and managerial sectors (especially in oil), and the military.

The Rise and Fall of Causa R.

The 1993 campaign of Velásquez and *Causa R* ("Radical Cause," with the "R" reversed in the party logo) posed the first serious challenge from a party seeking to break from the Punto Fijo system, and its original social base was organized labor. The grand strategy of *Causa R* was rooted in the thought of its late founder, Alfredo Maneiro, a former guerrilla leader, who criticized "vanguardism" and emphasized the importance of building social and worker movements from which leadership would emerge organically. Maneiro later attracted some members of the small, Marxist think-tank, *Ruptura,* which had kept alive De la Plaza's nationalist views on oil (see De la Plaza 1996; *Ruptura* 1975). Although oil policy was not a major feature of the *Causa R* campaign, the election elevated the profile of Alí Rodríguez Araque. As president of the Congressional Commission on Hydrocarbons, posed unexpected and, from the viewpoint of PDVSA's executives, unwelcome resistance to the oil *apertura*, the policy of opening Venezuela's oil fields in terms highly favorable to foreign capital.

Causa R had its greatest success in the area around the new industrial zone of Ciudad Guayana in Bolívar State, where the hegemony of the hegemony of *adeco* union leadership was weak (Hellinger 1996). By the mid-1980s, the party's labor movement, *Matanceros,* won control of several metallurgical unions, including the steelworkers, largest union in the country. A close, consultative relationship with workers was key to the party's resistance to co-optation, legal intervention, and repression, tactics that usually permitted the traditional parties to beat back challenges to their hegemony. Velásquez, the most prominent leader of the movement, scored a stunning victory gubernatorial elections in Bolívar in 1989, and *Causa R* established a presence in Congress and in Caracas as well. During his term of office in Bolívar State, Velásquez

and his associates governed in a consultative style resembling the movement-oriented politics of the PT in Brazil and the Sandinistas in the early years of the Nicaraguan Revolution (Hellinger 1996). In Congress, *Causa R* consistently supported the call for a Constituent Assembly – although it resisted the popular demand to replace proportional representation by a uninominal system. *Causa R* eschewed alliances with other leftist parties, which earned it a reputation for sectarianism but also enhanced its mass appeal as a fresh alternative.

Why, then, did *Causa R* insurgency falter after 1993, culminating in its division in 1997? Organizationally it failed to reconcile the need for internal discipline with the democratic, open relationship it sought with workers and other social forces. On the one hand, its ranks were open to whoever was willing to declare commitment to its democratic principles; on the other hand, power was retained by a small group of veteran leaders who operated by an informal but highly centralized decision-making process. As its star rose, especially in states where it had barely existed, opportunists joined party ranks. At the same time, it failed to extend debate about tactics and strategy beyond the ranks of its veteran leadership, whose personality differences deepened (Hellinger 1986).

The decision to leap ahead with a challenge for national power overtook the longer-run, grassroots organizing that had made the *Causa R* a promising alternative in the early 1990s. Velásquez might very well have won the presidential contest of 1993, but the candidacy itself contradicted the more strategic vision that had been laid out by Maneiro, which was predicated on grassroots organizing, not immediate pursuit state power. Some leaders in the party were pursuing military routes to power, claiming that the political establishment would never let them come to power through elections (Buxton 2001: 162-163). Pablo Medina, Secretary General of the *Causa R* until 1997, acknowledged that he and others to have organized civilian support to give the 1992 *golpe* a "civic-military" character. Disagreements over political strategy contributed to a division between the Velásquez faction, which retained the party moniker, and Medina's followers, who founded the *Partido Para Todos* (PPT) (Hellinger 1996; Buxton 2001: 176-179).

Causa R backed a technocratic independent, Irena Saez, in the 1998 election before switching to its own candidate. In the 2000 election it supported the main opponent of Chávez. It maintained influence through the *Nuevo Sindicalismo* ("new unionism") labor movement, which remained aligned with Velásquez and in competition with the Bolivarian Workers Front for labor support. For its part, the PPT backed Chávez in the December 1998 elections, left *chavista* Patriotic Pole (PP) alliance just before the mega-elections of 2000, then rejoined the party again. The PPT retained control (shared with another small leftist party) of the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) because of the success and prestige of Rodríguez, who ascended to the presidency of OPEC in 2000. But the PPT remained without seats in Congress and for practical purposes neither fully in support of nor in opposition to the government. The option of an *obrerist* party rooted in social movements, resembling the role of the PT of Brazil, had receded.

Business and the Middle Sectors

The collapse of the rentist model had a severe impact on domestic capitalists and the middle class. Financial crises, unemployment, administrative corruption, rising crime rates, limited opportunities in professional fields, and declining salaries all contributed to the shrinkage of the middle class. (See Table 2) The departure of foreign oil and its replacement by the state subtracted from the business world the strongest private sector of capital. Groups of professionals and survivors from the shrinking middle class launched political projects, but most were little more than romantic forays into cyberspace. The campaign of former Irene Saez is emblematic of the mercurial nature of movements and parties launched within this sector.

Table 2: Shrinkage of the Middle Class, 1989-1999, by criteria of Consultores 21 Polling Firm

100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
I-89 I-90 I-91 I-92 I-93 I-94 I-95 I-96 I-97 I-98 I-99
Media Alta
Media
Pop. Media
Pop. Baja
Marginal

Saez had parlayed her fame as Miss Universe and role as a spokesperson for a major bank (*Consolidado*) into a successful run for mayor of the Chacao, a wealthy municipality in the Caracas metropolitan area. Her administration was respected for transparency and efficiency. To seek the presidency she launched, “Irene,” yet another personalist electoral movement intended to demonstrate a candidate’s independence from *puntofijismo.* Throughout most of 1997 she was far ahead of any other “pre-candidate” in the polls and seemed a good bet to become Venezuela’s next president, which prompted COPEI, facing dismal electoral prospects, to place her name at the head of its ballot. Her candidacy offered the prospect of an anti-party candidacy consistent with the middle class’s desire to participate in a globalized capitalist economy.

Early in the campaign lack of a clear program, neoliberal or otherwise, was an advantage, but this became a liability once voters began to listen for clues to what a Saez presidency might mean. She offered at best a vague discourse in the media. That the Venezuelan parties had been notoriously resistant to increasing the representation of women in political life (Friedman 2000) certainly did not help her prospects. Pageants may be popular in Venezuela, but this former beauty queen was now identified with a wealthy enclave in the capital. Her acceptance of the nomination of COPEI deprived her of the luster of an outsider. By contrast, the charismatic Chávez drew on his humble

origins to feed his "man of the people image." As Saez fell in the polls, Chávez rose. Many in the business and professional community cast about for an alternative, finding it eventually in Enrique Salas Romer, a former businessman, once a member of COPEI, and then independent governor of the state of Carabobo.

Even while Saez was still riding high in the polls, speculation in the media centered on a candidate from the only sector of Venezuelan business that seemed to be prospering – the state oil company. Although he always denied interest in the nomination, Luis Giusti, president of PDVSA and chief architect of the *apertura*, was being discussed in late 1997 as *presidenciable* by some leaders of *Causa R* (*El Nacional*, May 21, 1997, January 15, 1998), COPEI (R. Giusti, 1997; *El Nacional*, May 16, 1997), MAS, and, most surprisingly, AD. The alienation of oil executives from the political system had much to do with the development of the *apertura*. Giusti had campaigned to gain the support of the *adeco caudillo*, Alfaro Ucero, the Party Secretary, seeking to reverse the traditionally skeptical attitude of AD toward foreign investment in oil. Ucero not only endorsed the *apertura* but reportedly came to see Giusti as a possible candidate for his party (*El Nacional*, July 27, 1997). In addition to oil executives, some financial groups linked to international investors were said to be promoting Giusti as a candidate (*El Nacional*, April 15 and April 20, 1998).

The collapse of oil prices in 1998 dealt a severe blow to the prestige of Giusti and the company. The PDV president had predicated his stress on new investments in heavy crude on a price of $16 to $18, but the price fell throughout the year, reaching less than seven dollars by February 1999. The previously untouchable reputation of PDVSA management now came into question. The removal of Giusti became a popular campaign promise for *Chávez (El Universal Digital*, September 14, 1998). Meanwhile, Ucero used control of the party apparatus to secure own nomination and ran a disastrous campaign. Salas Romer became the alternative for those seeking a technocratic outsider. To draw a comparison again to Brazil, Salas Romer represented the best hope of the middle class and business sectors for candidate who might engineer a "soft landing" for neoliberalism, structural adjustment with a human face, comparable to the administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. But oil economics and nationalism conspired against this result.

The Military

The February 4 rebellion and a second failed coup on November 27 revealed a deep chasm between the civilian politicians and the military, one of the key sectors compromised by the Punto Fijo agreement. Considering the role the military had played in suppressing the *caracazo*, this was entirely unanticipated. Arturo Sosa Abascal, a historian and as editor of the Jesuit *Revista SIC* a keen observer of the Venezuelan scene, wrote after the urban riots, "In a moment in which the faithfulness of the military was vital to its survival, the Armed Forces reacted as a fundamental (and founding) ally of the political system installed in Venezuela after 1958" (1989: 104).

Indeed, the military itself had seemed quite adept at rent-seeking. While the economy had been failing in the 1980s, the military budget had actually tripled, reaching 3.6 percent of the gross national product in 1987. With 50,000 men under arms in ten

brigades and five divisions, Venezuela had 103 active brigadier generals and thirty generals of division, in contrast with Brazil, whose army was five times larger and had only 116 generals altogether. The Congress decided annual promotions. Although this reinforced civilian supremacy, it also enhanced the importance of partisan affiliation of officers as promotions, like everything else, fell under the influence of the *cogollos* (party leaders) and were tainted by corruption. Several embarrassing scandals indicated that officers were intricately enmeshed in the system of patronage and corruption that had discredited the politicians (Hellinger 1991: 163-168).

The military rebellions of 1992 demonstrated that some officers, particularly those who formed the MBR, had not assimilated North American geopolitical doctrines nor been fully integrated into the structures of *puntofijismo*. Chávez and his collaborators in the MBR were the first cohort of officers to have undergone education at the civilian universities and not to have undergone training at U.S. counterinsurgency schools. In the early 1980s Chávez had made contact with several former guerrilla commanders, including one, Douglas Bravo, who had never renounced armed struggle. Accounts differ as to how influential they were, but these leftists clearly influenced the ideological development of the MBR from its earliest days (Garrido 1999; Gott 2000; Blanco Muñoz 1998:272-276) and kept in tact a historical tradition of insurgency that seemed to have been laid to rest after 1968.

The nationalism incubating in the MBR drew upon a deep tradition of populist caudillism in Venezuelan history. The least known, but possibly most emblematic, of the trinity (including Bolívar and the philosopher/teacher, Simón Rodríguez) of heroes in MBR rhetoric is Ezequiel Zamora, a Liberal caudillo assassinated in 1860, allegedly from within his own ranks during the Federalist War (See Banko 1996: 169-183). During the 1960s leftists, such as the folk singer Ali Primera, built a mythic reputation around Zamora, even if most Venezuelans otherwise knew little of his history. Chávez, from the *llanero* region of Barinas, where Zamora achieved his greatest following, exalted the Federalist martyr and appropriated his anti-oligarchic rhetoric, which resonates in his mass rallies, televised speeches and weekly radio broadcasts. Like that of Zamora, Chávez's egalitarian discourse is often vague on specifics, laced with racial overtones, evocative of the resentment of the masses, and threatening to elites. "*Horror al oligarquía*," was a popular Federalist cry. Humberto Celli, a prominent leader of AD, lamented how far his party had drifted from the affection of the masses since the days of Betancourt when he took note of the tumultuous scene that greeted Chávez in December 1998 when he gave his victory speech, delivered from a window of the presidential palace newly dedicated to his followers. "When I saw Chávez trimphant on the 'People's Balcony,' greeting the multitude, and the TV cameras focused on those delirious faces, I said to myself, 'My God, those are the *negritas* of *Acción Democrática'*" (Colomina 2001).

The MBR, under Chávez's leadership, had espoused abstention from elections, but this stance began to give way as the movement began to more openly interact with civilian sectors. Francisco Arias Cárdenas, a popular hero in the February 4 *golpe* because of his successful seizure of governor's palace in the Maracaibo, Zulia, demonstrated the

electoral potential of the MBR by winning the governorship that state in 1995, with the backing of *Causa R*. Chávez, meanwhile, initially disdained electoral politics, but in prison he found a political tutor in the form of Miquilena and María Isabel Rodríguez, whom he would later marry. After his release from jail in 1994, Chávez lived for a year in the apartment of Miquilena, then a minor figure in Venezuelan politics, but a veteran practitioner with ties to the banking and insurance industries, some of whom helped finance the candidate's 1998 campaign (Santodomingo, 2000). In 1997 Chávez decided to convert the MBR into the MVR, which attracted legions of new members, including refugees from the sinking *puntofijista* ship. The PPT, MAS and some smaller parties joined with the hegemonic MVR to form the *Polo Patriótico* (PP).

The penultimate lineup of candidates in 1998 included Saez, backed by her own electoral movement (IRENE) and COPEI; Ucero for AD; Salas Romer, who called his electoral movement *Projecto Venezolano*; and Chávez, backed by the PP, of which the MVR was by far the largest component. In an effort to test the electoral waters and save candidacies from being overwhelmed by the appeal of Chávez, the major parties advanced local and state elections by a month. When MVR ran well, traditional parties panicked. Governors, no longer cowed by central party authorities, took the lead in moving the parties to abandon their candidates and back Salas. Barely a week before the election, too late to modify the ballot, COPEI withdrew its support from Saez. AD, in the face of bitter resistance from the old *caudillo*, withdrew the candidacy of Ucero. Both endorsed the Salas Romer. The ugly denouement probably did little to help the Carabobo governor. Chávez defeated him by a margin of 54.4 to 39.9 percent.

New President, New Constitution, New Politics?

In the 1998 campaign, Chávez separated himself from Salas Romer by assuming an unequivocal position in favor of a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution. By resisting the idea, Salas Romer lost much of his appeal as an anti-system candidate. After the elections of November and December, the traditional parties held sufficient seats in Congress to block a Constituent Assembly to write a new Constitution, so Chávez quickly to called and won a popular referendum to produce this result. He won overwhelmingly the December 1999 vote on the new "Bolivarian Constitution" and then stood for election again in the "megaelections" of July 2001, when all elected officials, from the president down to municipal councilors, were required to renew their mandates. The Polo Popular swept to victory, achieving large majorities in the new, unicameral legislature. Chávez defeated his closest challenger, Arias, now assuming the role of moderate alternative, by a margin of 21 percentage points (57 to 36 percent).

Although Chávez appealed to all strata, those who most support them in these elections were young, male, and lower class (e.g., see Datanalisis poll, *El Universal*, April 6, 2000). The presidential race between Chávez and Arias was especially polarized, with Datanalisis showing Chávez preferred by a wide margin by the poorest social sectors, but trailing Arias badly (66.7 to 14.3 percent) among the wealthy and middle class (*El Universal*, April 6, 2000). This difference persisted into the early years of the Chávez.

When the smoke had cleared after the megaelection in July 2000, the opposition was in total disarray. The closest competitor to the PP was AD, which held only 20 seats in the Assembly. Subsequently the delegation split into two factions divided on whether to assume a hard-line or pragmatic approach in opposition. COPEI had virtually been extinguished as a national force. Neither Salas Romer nor Arias emerged as poles of opposition immediately after the megaelection. Chávez had devastated the old party system, but his own political movement had yet to prove it had an institutional vitality apart from the charisma of the president, and the rates of abstention persisted. Changing institutional arrangements, however much desired by the people, had not resolved the problem institutionalizing a new political order.

***Tercermundismo* at Home and Abroad**

Although *chavismo* dominated the state apparatus, his opponents were well organized in civil society, especially in the media. What sustained the president's popularity was his ability to tap into the deep reserve of popular resentment toward the old political class and his ability to pursue an independent foreign policy that reinforced his revolutionary credentials. Various ideological influences shaped the worldview of *chavismo*. Because of the program of placing cadets in civilian universities, Chávez and his fellow conspirators came in contact with leftist intellectuals, some of whom would important posts in his administration. His outlook reflects not only Venezuelan nationalism but ideas drawn from an eclectic range of leaders and thinkers from Fidel Castro to Tony Blair ("third way") and Norberto Ceresole, a self-exiled Argentine sociologist who offered a neo-fascist critique of the post-Cold War dominance of the United States, tinged with anti-semitism. Chávez has eschewed the latter but found in the ideas of Celesole (who has since broken with Chávez) validation for his conception of a fusing of civilian and military components in defense of national values and interests.

Opponents have made much of the relationship between Chávez and leaders of countries that the United States labels "rogue states," his refusal to cooperate with the U.S. drug war on Colombia, allegations that his administration tried to harbor Vladimir Montesinos (the renegade Peruvian strongman), and his friendly relations with Colombian guerrillas. After devastating floods destroyed the transportation infrastructure along the littoral, Chávez refused to allow American military engineer units to deploy and help in the rescue and rebuilding efforts. At the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, Chávez refused to endorse the resolution that called for conditioning membership in a hemispheric free trade zone on electoral democracy.

What these actions all have in common is resistance to uni-polar domination of the world by the United States. Relations with countries like Iraq and Libya can be explained on a pragmatic basis – the need to coordinate oil policy. The *chavista* offensive to revitalize OPEC was undertaken with geo-strategic, now just economic goals. Chávez, much as Bolívar and Martí before him and Castro today, perceives the United States as a threat to a unified, free Latin America. Like Ceresole, he is particularly wary of Washington's desire to refashion the Latin American military into an

instrument of hemispheric defense of U.S. hegemony under the guise of defending democracy.

This independent foreign policy has, like everything else, deeply divided the country. The contrasting visions of the "modern" middle class and the "*negritas*" who support Chávez are reflected in the rhetoric surrounding OPEC. The most significant foreign policy accomplishment of the administration was the successful call for the Second Summit of Heads of States and Governments of the Member Countries of OPEC, which took place in Caracas in September 2000. Points 12, 13 and 14 of the "Declaration of Caracas" issued at the summit reaffirmed OPEC's commitment to leadership of the entire underdeveloped world and called for substantial reduction of the developing countries' debt, and called for the "just and equitable treatment of oil in the world energy market" in negotiations over environmental, fiscal, and energy problems. By contrast, the "modernized" oil executives pose the most articulate and powerful resistance with Venezuelan civil society to the Third World outlook championed by Chávez.

Well before nationalization the foreign oil companies "Venezuelanized" their management. Perhaps it is more accurate to say the companies had "westernized" the outlook of the native managerial strata. The generation of managers that embarked on the oil *apertura* pressed for Venezuela's departure from OPEC and privatization of PDVSA not only in economic but cultural terms. Arturo Sosa Pietri, former president of PDVSA, described membership in OPEC as nothing less than the rejection of Western modernity. "Our country was never a colony, not of Spain nor of any other power," he argued on the eve of Chavez's 1998 victory. For Sosa terms "discovery" or "encounter" pertain more to Venezuela than "conquest" because the country's territory was, he claims, thinly populated by tribes living close to a state of nature. The wars of liberation in Africa and Asia were to preserve cultures often thousands of years old, whereas the Independence War of Venezuela was more a civil conflict among a population with European ethical and religious values. Had it not been for OPEC, argued Sosa Pietri, "we could have aspired, because of our origins, cultural roots, and territorial wealth, to convert ourselves quickly into full associates of the so-called 'first world'" (1998).

Oil policy was not settled by the Constitution, which prohibits (Article 302) privatization of PDV but leaves open the possibility of privatizing subsidiaries. Chávez submitted a new organic law for mining and hydrocarbons to the National Assembly in August 2001. The draft required the state to maintain at least 51 percent of the shares of the company's subsidiaries, which generated criticism from former company executives waging a public relations campaign in favor of liberal terms for investment and joint ventures. Chávez had treated the oil issue mainly in terms of alleged corruption in the company, especially in implementation of its internationalization policies, and as a matter of relations with OPEC. The important debate over regulating private investment was almost *sub rosa*, much of it on the Internet (e.g., www.petroleoyv.com and www.analica.com) where the weight of middle class and professional opinion clearly leans toward some form of privatization.

If the foreign policy of President Chávez has significantly broken from the pro-Washington outlook of *puntofijismo*, his exercise of power at home represents less clear a break. For all of his revolutionary rhetoric, candidate Chávez attracted support from sectors of the business community, which provided indispensable financial help for the campaign. The degree and nature of the *quid pro quo* was unclear, but by some reports he owed much to insurance interests, public relations firms, developers and even fugitive bankers eager to return to Venezuela once Caldera departed (Ojeda 2001; Santodomingo 2000). Discontent with the way the loosely organized but tightly controlled MVR designated candidates for legislative and local elections in the megaelection produced further defections, particularly among professionals who had hoped for a clearer break with traditional practices (e.g., Ojeda, 2001).

The MVR, under adroit direction of Miquilena, began to practice tactical politics associated with *puntofijismo*. After the July 2000 elections it offered the *Proyecto Venezuela* of Salas Romer a vice presidency in the new Assembly in exchange for legislative support. In early 2001 the MVR reached out to a majority faction of AD headed by Deputy Henry Ramos Allup for support on some legislation, while Miquilena threatened MAS with expulsion from the PP if it continued to withhold support from some initiatives (e.g., in education) opposed by the middle class. On the one hand, this kind of alliance behavior belied the notion that Chávez, like Fujimori, intended to close Congress and execute an "*auto-golpe*." On the other hand, Chávez several times threatened to ask for emergency powers, which his majority in the Assembly could provide, to issue decrees without legislative approval. Such powers were often granted presidents during the Fourth Republic, but critics saw in it a grab for dictatorial power.

Thirty months into his presidency, Chávez could point to some evidence of progress in arresting the secular decline in wages and unemployment visible in various social and economic measures covering 1990 to 1998. A survey carried out in March 2001 showed that over nine hundred thousand Venezuelans had escaped extreme poverty during the previous year, equivalent to a drop of four percentage points. (*Venezuela al Día*, Miami, July 2001, www.venezuelaaldia.com) However, this hardly represents the kind of rapid progress many of his supporters hoped to see. One opposition think-tank, the Workers' Center for Documentation and Analysis (CENDA) claimed 90 percent of Venezuelan households had insufficient income to meet basic necessities, with 55 percent of the population in extreme poverty (*El Universal*, Caracas, January 30, 2001). These are the people who most fervently place their hopes in Chávez, but they are also posing difficult dilemmas as he tries to balance their interests against his desire to avoid a fundamental break with the rest of society.

Chávez combined his remarkable charisma and skill in the mass media with a highly personal distribution of rents. Many of the callers to his weekly radio program, *¡Aló, Presidente!*, seek to resolve problems in finding employment or obtaining a benefit from a particular social service agency. On the occasion of a presidential caravan to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the February 4 revolt, televised interviews with bystanders featured people pleading for redress of specific problems. The grievances were often attributed to the neglect or callousness of individuals associated (so said the

speakers) with the old regime. The presidential office even created a special bureau to attend to thousands of similar petitions arriving daily in the mail, by way of telephone calls to *¡Alo, Presidente!,* and from people waiting on line outside of Miraflores Palace or La Casona, the president's official residence (*El Nacional*, Caracas, January 26, 2001).

Chávez powerfully articulates the resistance of the poor to marginzalization, but this complicates governance. For example, in a his speech commemorating the ninth anniversary (Feb. 4, 2001) of his coup attempt, Chávez referred to a highly visible and voluble conflict between *buhoneros* (ambulant street vendors) and municipal authorities. He repeated his promise never to send the security forces to assault them, "*el soberano*", evoking a contrast with bitter memories of the repression of the *caracazo*. Yet he also praised the mayor of Caracas (Freddy Bernal) and asked the *buhoneros* to be patient as he tried to resolve the differences between the vendors and residents of a neighborhood in which a market for the vendors was to be located. He told the vendors, who had been evicted peacefully from the popular Sabana Grande pedestrian avenue with the promise of relocation to the market, to have patience. Their problems, said the president, rooted in the failures *puntofijimismo* and cannot be rectified overnight.

The *buhoneros* heard the promise not to deploy security forces, but their patience had worn thin. For days they had been occupying a weed-strewn, vacant plot where the promised market was to be located. Municipal police had surrounded them. Perched on a cement wall around the plot were young men in red berets. Banners proclaimed the vendors "right to work," while angry neighbors milled around the vicinity. An agreement with municipal authorities had been reached, but the day after the Chávez speech, a group of vendors, frustrated with lack progress in resolving their grievances and without other sources of income, seized the Sabana Grande mall and had to be dislodged by mounted police, resulting in some injuries. The incident is just one of many that pose difficult decisions for Chávez and the MVR as it seeks to negotiate an accommodation between those who have been marginalized and those struggling to avoid the same fate.

Chávez seeks to represent the marginalized, excluded, and impoverished sectors, which form the majority, but he cannot simply ignore the power of the privileged, globalized few, both nationally and internationally. This dilemma underlay his handling of the conflict between *buhoneros* and neighborhood associations, and it has been visible in myriad other conflicts as well. Opponents are eager to seize on *tomas*, demonstrations, and strikes as evidence of lawlessness, but at the same time they are eager to portray enforcement as repression. In addition, the situation lends itself to opportunistic actions by (predominantly) young *chavistas* who are only loosely organized into the MVR and certainly not subject to organizational discipline. This places the MVR in a difficult position politically. It also makes the Chávez vulnerable to destabilization by the United States and creates difficulties for its image abroad. When he articulates suspicions of outside interference, these are taken as signs of its paranoia, yet there are ample precedents in Latin America to justify his concerns.

It is tempting to attribute the mass appeal of Chávez to skillful manipulation of public opinion and his talents as a social communicator, but this is to devalue the

importance of the message itself. In his discourse Chávez consistently privileges lower class interests over those of other social classes and sectors. This was not something artificially created by public relations specialists. As Alberto Muller Rojas, who served as chief of staff for the 1998 campaign, put it, the Chávez image was "self-constructed." A significant amount of the MVR's limited publicity budget was devoted to mass distriubtion of posters immediately *after* the pronouncement of Chávez as winner. The text was carefully chosen: "Chávez, President, everyone for Venezuela now (*ahora*)." "*Ahora*" was an attempt to capitalize on the phrase "*por ahora*," which Chávez pronounced in his short surrender speech in 1992, admitting that "for now" his plans had been frustrated. (*Boína imágen* 1999)

The discourse of Chávez is disconcerting and infuriating to elites. The explanation, says Alejandro Moreno, a Salesian priest and social psychologist who has lived for more than a decade in a Caracas *barrio*, is that the president addresses himself to "the people", not to them. For Moreno, the enthusiastic response of the people to his message cannot be put down to charisma, manipulation, or demagoguery. "What is important is not what he speaks but what speaks inside him. In him speaks the convivial relations of popular Venezuela, of convivial man. …An elderly woman expressed it very well: 'For me, it's like my own son is president'" (Moreno, 1998b: 5).

Celli's rueful comment on "*negritas*" evokes the manner in which the discourse of Chávez appropriates intertwined class and racial identities in Venezuelan political culture. Less appreciated in the manipulation of gender politics by both Chávez and the opposition. On the one hand, women have occupied several high positions in the cabinet and for the first time, the Vice Presidency). The president's spouse, Marísabel, is a prominent advisor and public relations asset to the MVR. On the other hand, public opinion surveys show that across all social classes men are more likely than women to support Chávez, which may become a significant political factor if gap between the opposition and president narrows. Women head many of the social movements frustrated by the administration's failure to implement fully consultation with civil society. As with earlier efforts to incorporate women into party organization (see Friedman 2000), the MVR seems intent on subordinating Bolivarian women's groups to other goals. Much presidential rhetoric is paternalistic, if not macho. However, the opposition also has not hesitated to appeal to baser prejudices in the culture, as it did when it sent women's panties to military officers, clearly implying that failure to rise up against the president brought into question their masculinity.

Chávez mobilizes subaltern sentiments against the privileged by themes that are deeply ingrained in Venezuelan history and national identity. A good example is his national radio and television broadcast of June 15, 2001. For several hours the president held a "conversation" with his audience, scorning his critics as "*los escualidos*". In a conversational style, punctuated by friendly asides to studio workers, he discussed several foreign policy initiatives, including his plans to attend several international conferences and visit several foreign capitals.

It would be naïve to think that ordinary Venezuelan citizens are any more captivated by discussions of presidential itineraries or details of domestic policy than most other people. The middle class finds the programs especially tedious, but they are not the target audience. Chávez uses the media to portray Venezuela as once again a player in world events, a country shaping them, not merely at their mercy. In both style and substance his addresses and conversational programs communicate to the economically marginalized that this president takes them into his confidence. The very vocal annoyance expressed by opponents ratifies the perception that he is their voice in a world that otherwise seeks to discard them or sees their welfare as at best a residual product of economic policies that would immediately worsen their conditions.

Another use of the media is to convey of the *chavista* hermeneutics about history. In his June 15 broadcast, the president followed news of his foreign policy initiatives with an exhortation to his audience to read Ramón Velásquez's book on the fall of the "yellow liberal" regime in 1899. Displaying several photos of the troops of General Cipriano Castro, leader of the insurgents, he proclaimed,

> "These are the troops of the Liberal Restoration Army of General Cipriano Castro. …They came from the Andes. …Here is the camp. Venezuela is at war, ending the century at war because independence, as Bolívar recognized, managed to break the chains of Spain but not to complete the social revolution. [To someone in the studio.] Put the photo up again so that you can see …here it is…this is a poor people. See them, with their banners, shoeless, with their old drums, their coronets, and their leader, Cipriano Castro, in front, a people seeking justice because after Independence they were betrayed, and today they continue seeking justice. We thank God that one hundred years later we are embarked on this course without a war; we are embarked on a peaceful battle, in a democratic battle. A God, the Virgin, and everybody is saying calling to the country to struggle to make this road victorious. It will be so in order to avoid that things turn out to repeat themselves as they have throughout Venezuelan history. (www.analitica.com)

Here Chávez takes as his model a controversial, often reviled figure evoking obvious comparisons to his own situation. Castro, like Chávez, presented himself as a charismatic, nationalist leader, often scorned as a tyrant with an unstable personality, leading a movement of the poor against perfidious elites associated with a discredited form of liberalism. Displaying a photo of prominent bankers who financed a revolt against Castro, Chávez drove home a comparison to his own political enemies, but he was quick to claim that his enemies, "*los escualidos,*" were much less potent.

The politicization of history finds expression in debates over public holidays. For example, in an attempt to preserve the memory of January 23, 1958, the date of a popular uprising against General Pérez Jiménez, the opposition introduced a resolution into the Assembly calling for a public commemoration of the date. For his part, Chávez characterized the anniversary as a sad reminder of the failures of the regime it inaugurated. In response to strong media support for commemorating January 23 date,

the president promoted a major mobilization and alternative celebration of the anniversary of the February 4, 1992 coup attempt.

Three days before the February 4 events, the government staged an elaborate ceremony at the Pantheon, where the remains of Bólivar and many other national heros are buried, to commemorate the birthday of Zamora, the nineteenth century *caudillo* regarded as the supreme example of popular rebellion against an oligarchy. Chávez shares the same hometown in the Venezuelan *llanos*, and frequently invoked by the president as an inspiration for his Bolivarian revolution. However, illness prevented the president from appearing, and the turnout was meager. In contrast, the event in Caracas was high theater and massive. Yellow with red splashed across it, the colors of the MVR, were prominent throughout the event. In his speech Chávez referred to the turnout as a rebuke to the major media organizations and polls suggesting some slippage in his popularity. "These are polls that count," said the president.

Chávez told his followers that that the intellectuals don't know history the way the people do. Although he acknowledged that January 23 uprising contributed to the flight of Pérez Jiménez, he went on challenge history as it has been written under *adeco* hegemony. He praised Medina as the greatest president of the century, decried the Oct. 18, 1945 coup that toppled the general. He characterized the *trienio* as a sectarian government that, along with the coup, paved the way for the return of dictatorship. He claimed the Bolivarian Constituent Assembly consulted the population in a way that the *trienio* one did not. He argued that the coup attempts of 1992 were justified and put down with considerable loss of life. By contrast, he said, Medina was introducing democracy but had surrendered rather than open fire on civilians and on young cadets supporting the coup. By contrast, the armed forces had been ordered by the leaders of the Punto Fijo regime to fire on the people to put down the *caracazo*.

Such competing claims and interpretations hardly generate consensus among Venezuelan historians, much less politicians. More significantly, the debate indicates how deeply divided Venezuelans are about the meaning of their own history, and how divided on what they want democracy to mean. Chávez draws upon Simón Rodríguez for a vision of democracy in more radical, Roussian terms, one that envisions a strong democratic state working actively to transform society to lay the basis for republican rule. The opposition offers a more Lockean vision of polyarchy, characterized by checks and balances and consistent with the liberal, Washington consensus (See Robinson, 1996).

There is little reason to believe that capitalist globalization holds much promise of being inclusive for most Venezuelans because social conditions offer minimal promise for investments that will generate employment. Wages are too high for labor intensive industries, but levels of education and skills are not adequate for capital intensive, high-tech industries. On a world scale capitalist globalization remains uneven, perhaps more so than ever before. Mounting rates of world poverty suggest globalized capitalism is marginalizing greater numbers than it is incorporating into its circuits. It is customary for opponents to blame Chávez for the exodus of 150,000 Venezuelans, but the underlying cause of this reversal is runs deeper in the international economy.

The power and appeal of the Chávez message resides in his ability to articulate the deep resentment felt by the people. Few Venezuelans are versed in the history of yellow liberalism, the Federalist Wars, or the writings of Ezequiel Zamora, Simón Rodríguez, and Bolívar, but much of state culture (monuments and the national anthem, for example) celebrates the historical myth associating Venezuelan national identity with a popular, egalitarian struggle for freedom against a perfidious oligarchy. In this conception of the nation, its "people" refers not to the bourgeois meaning of "people" as a civil society composed of legal equals, sharing a common national identity, integrated into market society and modern culture. "People" refers to a majority of Venezuelans who live in that "other" society at the margins of civil society as it is known to the wealthy, the middle class, and parts of the working class. The project of Betancourt was to integrate poor Venezuelans into modern national culture, predominantly a Western, cosmopolitan, urban culture.

Modern and Subaltern Conceptions of Democracy

The model of political modernization bequeathed to political science by the French Revolution and Enlightenment, suggests that Latin America will only progress once its traditional, personalist culture is replaced by a civic culture populated with rational, educated citizens capable of competing in both the economic and political marketplace. Consistent with the principles of democracy as polyarchy, citizens are to articulate their interests through freely formed organizations in civic society. Secular modernists like Betancourt, Rómulo Gallegos, Luis Beltran Figueroa, and others sought to tame *la barbarie* and, aided by oil rents, build a modern, Western democratic society, but the system they created never fully transcended the cultural and class divide between this liberal ideal and a population oriented not so much to traditional so much as "solidaristic" relations.

The tendency toward caudillism is not restricted to *el soberano*. In a context of institutional void and instability, middle class and buisness communities were in search of a candidate with a strong personality, one who could fill the void left by the collapse of the parties. In mid 1997, Consultores 21 asked a cross section of the population what model of president they preferred – Fidel Castro, Alberto Fujimori, another figure, or nobody. (See Table 3) Although Castro was most popular among the most marginalized sectors of the population, his 25 percent paled compared to the enthusiasm of the lower middle to upper class for Alberto Fujimori. More than accomplishments, it was Fujimori's "strong personality" that most attracted the middle class.

Table 3 Type of President Favored by Different Social Strata

Modelo de Presidente que queremos

	Total	Marginal	Pop. Baja	Pop. Media	Media	Media-Alta
Alberto Fujimori	43	10	32	53	49	50
Ninguno	18	27	23	14	15	27
Fidel Castro	16	25	17	13	16	4
Otros	18	19	19	16	18	15

Fuente: Percepción 21 Volumen 2, No. 2 Junio 1997. Pag.6

The issue in Venezuela today may not be caudillism versus democracy, but what kind of caudillism, representing whose interests, will prevail.

The Punto Fijo regime integrated Venezuelan across class and racial lines (less so across gender; see Friedman 2000) into populist system of reconciliation, but the result was not the modern, Western civil society envisioned by its founders. Moreno captured the nature of the system as follows:

> The leadership is oriented to a modern model, but the popular base has its own manner of relating to one another. The two worlds co-exist in one party. The leadership has been sufficiently astute, perhaps because it is not as modern as it seems, in not forcing the people to enter into a rational model. Thus, severe conflicts are restricted to leadership circles but kept from dividing the party from its base. (1997: 25-26)

Moreno says that the national network of *adeco* party organizations consisted of local base committees connect by "family ties or by ties of godparentage, friendship, regional origins. They form a family tapestry." Kinship relations were "human bridges" within the party network (1997: 25). More of AD's "human bridges" were being marginalized from processes of social integration as the rents were siphoned from the economy overseas.

Chávez seems both to embrace and reject a portrait of him as a rogue statesman. Erudite and pragmatic, he eschews labels and repeatedly defines himself in terms of what he is *not*. This, of course, leaves open the question of what he really is. There is no *Plan of Barranquilla* (Betancourt's political manifesto of 1931) nor *De Una a Otra Venezuela* (the best known of Arturo Uslar Pietri's political writings) outlining a vision of the future. Chávez has yet to propose a coherent, alternative economic policy framework to neoliberalism, but if he did so he would undoubtedly be accused of being doctrinaire. One political solution is to portray himself as the opposite of his enemies. But how can he portray his opponents as powerless ("*los escualidos*") yet hope to use them as a point of reference for organizing a movement? One solution would be to raise the level of nationalist rhetoric against the United States, but this has other costs that the president, as a political realist, seems to understand.

More troubling is his failure to build a political organization capable of empowering people and drawing on the solidarism of community life. Furthermore, as the organizational weaknesses of the MVR have become more apparent, Chávez has tended to rely more upon the MBR to staff key posts in the public administration. In July 2001 the president called for the reactivation of the MBR and for people to join his grassroots level Bolivarian Circles, leading some to believe that Chávez himself fears the MVR is reproducing politics associated with *puntofijismo*. Although almost always pursuing negotations with opponents, he has lambasted critics of his educational and union reforms with threatening rhetoric and contempt. For its part, the opposition has seized on every democratic lapse and exaggerated it in a way that has only increased the polarization. However, this does not lessen the political indeterminacy of the current moment in Venezuela, which is fraught with hope and danger for democracy.

Those who think the supporters of Hugo Chávez will abandon him entirely may be overlooking the deep veins of popular resentment of oligarchy, but those who think the Venezuelan masses have issued the president a blank check are also mistaken. “If he doesn’t do well, we’ll replace him, the same as we put him in there,” says one of Father Moreno’s neighbors in the *barrio* (1998b: 5). For all of his popularity, Chávez found himself facing significant public resistance to two of his high-priority programs, education reform and creation of a new Bolivarian union federation (See Ellner). Demonstrations in favor of his proposals in these areas failed to approach the magnitude of those by groups opposed. The legacy of 40 years of *puntofijismo*, the first extended democratic experience in country’s history, is that today the Venezuelan people are less likely to accept any leadership, whether originating from government or opposition, blindly.

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